

Rees and Wirsching Building
223 - 227 North Los Angeles Street
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
California

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PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAL-318
Page 1

REES AND WIRSCHING BUILDING

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: 223 - 227 North Los Angeles Street
OWNER: Building Demolished
USE: Parking Lot

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Late 19th Century commercial building, designed by C. J. Kuback for Rees and Wirsching, a partnership established in 1875, and dealing in agricultural implements and wagons. A three-story building of modified classic design with rusticated arch openings at the third floor.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This structure was originally built in 1890 for the firm of Rees and Wirsching and designed by C. J. Kubach.¹ The firm engaged in the business of agricultural implements and wagons. The partnership of Robert E. Wirsching and Samuel Rees was established in 1875. The biography of Mr. Wirsching deserves some attention for he was a typical example of the successful immigrant of the nineteenth century.

He was born in Saxe-Meiningen, Germany, February 15, 1846, and came to America at six years of age. He was raised and educated in Connecticut and was a diligent student, learning photography and carriage-painting. He married Carlotta Valencia about five years after coming to Los Angeles; the wedding was in 1880. Carlotta was a native daughter, having been born on Rancho Los "Felix" (Feliz). They had four children.

CAL-318
Page 2

The firm prospered by pioneering in the trade movement in Southern California to break from San Francisco's domination through purchasing of merchandise directly from the East, rather than through the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1884, a financial setback, due to disastrous floods, was overcome by their "energy, perseverance and strength of will", which not only enabled the partners to recover their losses but actually expand their business throughout the Southwest by improving methods of operation.

Wirsching's public service record included his election, from the second district, to the County Board of Supervisors for a four year term; from 1889-90, he also served as a member of the City Council, representing the ninth ward; and from 1893-94 he was a City Fire Commissioner.

"...steadily, step by step, he won his way to a position of honor in business and in public life, affording, by his life, a fitting example of what our country offers a man of energy and determination."²

After a fire in 1915, when the building was occupied by the Newmark Coffee Company, most of the interior was rebuilt although the exterior facade was largely untouched.³

At this point a brief reference to Mr. Harris Newmark, the founder of the above firm, should be made. He was also German born, having left for Los Angeles in 1851, and by 1860 had formed a partnership with the brothers Kasper and Samuel Cohn. The firm was first established in a "Brick Block at #41-51 North Los Angeles Street" with facilities of some 40,000 square feet that housed their wholesale produce of groceries, tobacco and liquor. Their trade extended from Bakersfield to Los Angeles and eastward as far as New Mexico and Texas, grossing a yearly two million dollars.⁴ In 1915, he wrote his memoirs "Sixty Years in Southern California", which is now a standard reference work.⁵

By 1962, the building was partitioned for multiple rental use for low income businesses and was "in bad repair" in a decaying section of the city. A fire in the middle of the year hastened its inevitable demolition, which was completed by early fall. The site is now a temporary parking lot.

REFERENCES

1. Flood, Frances Burrows - A Study of Architecture of the Period 1869-1900 Existing in Los Angeles in 1940, unpublished Thesis, University of Southern California, Department of Fine Arts, 1941
2. Guinn, J. M. - Historical and Biographical Record of Los Angeles and Vicinity, Chapman Publishing Company, Chicago, 1901, p. 501
3. Flood - above cit.
4. An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, The Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, 1889, p. 576
5. California and Californians, Edited by Rockwell D. Hunt, The Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1930, Vol. III, P.11

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The building, which is now demolished, is described in a general outline form based upon the author's cursory inspection of the structure after the fire and during the final raising process.

EXTERIOR

Floor Plan: Three floors, loft space, subsequently partitioned for individual rental units. Main facade faced east on Los Angeles Street and the plan oriented in the long axis north and south.

Wall Construction: The main facade was an example of a local adaptation of "French Renaissance", simply treated, which pervades the architectural picture of Los Angeles in the era 1869-1900. The exterior cast iron columns were stamped "Los Angeles Mft. Co." at their bases and the interior columns were probably the same.

The three floors of the facade were divided as follows:

The ground floor of bays of rectangular cast iron hollow columns, in a psuedo classic motif, were ten bays defined by eleven columns, of which four bays at each end of the facade had segmental arches, with the two center bays apparently having a balcony at the

CAL-318
Page 4

second floor. The ground floor bulkheads below the shop windows were finished with vertical T&G wood paneling; the columns carried iron lintels sheathed with brick.

The second floor had pediments over the windows, alternating with triangular and segmental pediments.

The third floor had ten quoined windows with semi-circular arches; there was also a quoined detailing at the corners of the building.

The entire effect was the appearance of a stone wall but in reality made of brick, plaster and cast-iron. This was typical for all the exterior walls and some major interior partions also.

Porches: Evidence of a second floor balcony at the two center bays is by inference of the two French doors that can be seen from the photograph with this report, as well as from an earlier one, which also does not show a balcony.

Doorways and Doors: The ground floor had bi-folding wood paneled pairs of doors for gate-type deliveries with stock stiles and rails and two light glazed units in each leaf in the upper half; with bottom hinged in-swinging transoms overhead; all were set in wood frames, applied stops. The overhead, rolling metal door seen in the photo of this report was added after 1940.

Windows: Softwood frames, probably redwood, double-hung sash with segmental or semi-circular arched heads.

Roof: Assumed wood joists, straight 1 x _ sheathing with rolled asphalt sheet roofing.

Cornice: The previously mentioned 1940 photo shows a pronounced overhang running the length of the facade, apparently in brick, resting on classic corbeled brackets which in turn sit on the top of the pilasters at the third floor. This was the original parapet which was later replaced with the iron rail seen on the accompanying photograph.

INTERIOR

CAL-318
Page 5

Floors: 1 x T&G planks on 2 x joists. Floors may have been supported by cast iron columns at one time, but finally were supported by wood posts and beams, heavy timber loft type plan.

Walls: There was at least one major partition of brick that ran laterally in the center of the building against which a stairway of wood lead to upper floors. The minor partitions were of typical wood lath and plaster; some drywall had been added in more recent times.

Ceilings: Wood 2 x joists over which was wood lath and plaster.

Doorways and Doors: Softwood frames, wood paneled stock doors and applied wood stops.

Trim: Softwood around openings and moulds; bases unknown.

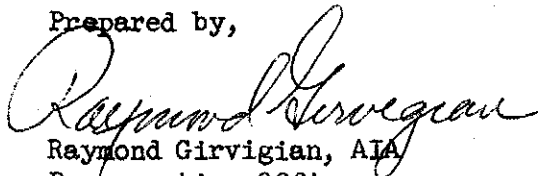
Hardware: Assumed as typical for the period; butt hinges, surface mounted latchsets and porcelain knobs.

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